Ford Kuga – Road Test

Published: May 21, 2019

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/ford-kuga-road-test/

FORD KUGA MID SIZE SUV STILL HOLDING ITS OWN FOR POPULARITY.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The Ford Kuga five door mid-sized SUV was introduced in 2008, the second edition in 2016 and the third generation is due from 2020 with Mild Hybrid, Plug-In Hybrid and Full-Hybrid powertrains plus petrol and diesel engine options.

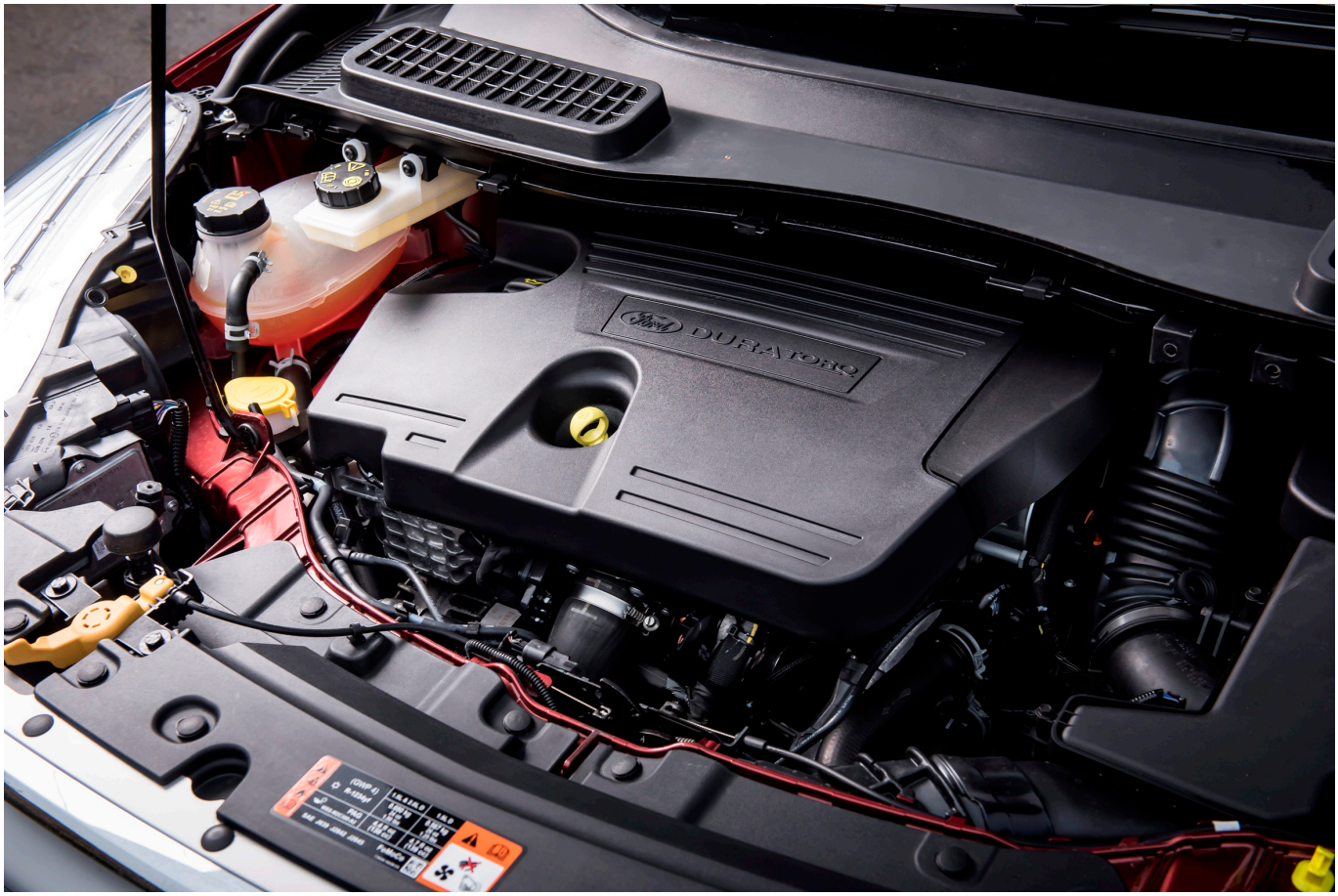
But before the all-new Kuga appears with its new global C2 architecture/platform, I have just had a driving week with the latest updated and final versions of the second generation Kuga.

The Kuga is Ford's third best selling model range after the Fiesta and Focus with over 1 million sold in Europe since the original models were introduced in 2008. So far this year In the UK the Ford Kuga is the second best selling SUV of any size after the Nissan Qashqai and just ahead of the Kia Sportage. Last year Ford sold 40,398 Kugas in the UK and for the first four months of this year they have sold 14,260 units as the SUV market continues to grow in a declining market for new car sales. SUV sales grew by 18.4% in April to 40,580 registrations, making them the third most popular body choice with sales tripling since 2012.

With 52 different derivatives of the recently refreshed 2019 model year Ford Kuga available to UK customers, prices start from £23,375 and go up to £37,200. Depending on the engine and specification level chosen there are petrol, diesel, 2WD or 4WD models with manual and automatic gearbox options. With such a wide choice of versions the Kuga can fit-the-bill for price conscious retail customers as well as the many rungs on the company car job-grade ladder.

The spec levels are the core Zetec before the range splits into two routes with what Ford calls 'luxury' models being Titanium Edition, Titanium X Edition and Vignale and the second route is 'sport' models with ST-Line and ST-Line Edition variants.

Engine options, depending on the spec grade, are all the latest EU6.2 c/d-Temp compliant units. These are the 1.5 litre EcoBoost 120, 150 and 176 hp turbo petrol units and turbodiesel 1.5 Duratorq TDCi 120 hp and 2.0 Duratorq TDCi 120, 150 and 180 hp units. My test model was the Kuga ST-Line Edition 2.0 litre TDCi 180 hp with Start/Stop function with the six-speed Powershift dual-clutch automatic gearbox and 4WD. The price is £36,260.



No matter what version is chosen all Kugas are sensibly sized, with well balanced handling and easy driving, and are well-equipped models with practical functional interior design. The kerb appeal is good as well with sensible design lines taking preference over contrived styling where fashion takes preference over function. As you'd expect from Ford it's a very practical, well made serviceable product, if not with the most desirable ownership value for 'brand-snobs'.

The sports ST-Line Edition higher spec includes larger 19-inch alloy wheels, a large rear spoiler, red brake callipers, Panorama roof and keyless entry. Like the slightly less costly ST-Line spec it has the sports suspension which doesn't make the ride uncomfortable, just sharpens the handling during cornering. It also has a full body sports styling kit, black finish roof rails, plus enhanced Active Park Assist with front and rear parking sensors in addition

to the rear view camera from other versions. Partial leather trim is also included, it has a dark roof lining, flat bottomed sports steering wheel, alloy pedals and ST-Line floor mats with red stitching.

Other spec items carried upwards from various levels in the range include the latest upgraded Ford Sync 3 DAB Navigation system with an 8-inch centrally position touchscreen with AppLink Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity functions, Emergency Assistance, auto lights and wipers, rear privacy glass, remote central locking, keyless entry with push start button, cruise control, radar Emergency Brake Assist and pedestrian detection, mini spare wheel and intelligent 4WD. The 4WD system distributes driving torque to each wheel as and when required but for normal use just runs in front wheel drive. Overall for spec, the interior layout, space front and rear and with the convenience of a 406 litre (14.34 cu.ft) boot, which extends to a very useful 1,603 litres (56.61 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded, and with a high and wide opening tailgate with no rear sill to lift items over onto the boot floor, it is very user-friendly and well thought out for fuss-free use.

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My only issue throughout a week of motoring was the sat-nav which froze on two occasions, strangely in the same location. Whilst the route was still shown operating on the screen map the voice instructions, time and arrival time all stopped but the radio continued to work.

Ride comfort was, considering the large wheels and sports suspension, comfortable and compliant and the handling very well-balanced. The steering was firm in the straight ahead position but lightened up once a turn was made and it remained very precise and accurate. With the added 4WD grip speedier cornering was always fully controlled with virtually no over or understeer. The 4WD system also gave a good account of itself travelling easily over farm tracks and fields – flat or hilly and will make light work of winter adverse road driving conditions.

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The 2.0 litre, four cylinder Duratorq TDCi 180 hp turbodiesel engine was well matched with the six-speed dual-clutch Powershift auto gearbox which also has a ‘Sports’ position and can be left in full auto mode or manual gearchanges can be made by using the steering column mounted paddles. With 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque available from 2,000 rpm this turbodiesel unit provides a wide powerband and coped easily with the long-legged 4th to 6th gear ratios which erred towards overdrive settings for fuel economy and reasonable CO2 emissions without harming outright performance. Top speed is 124 mph and zero to 62 mph acceleration time is 10.0 seconds.

This engine/auto gearbox combination scores well for real-life fuel economy. The official WLTP Combined Cycle figures are 37.7 to 38.7 mpg and my week of motoring, the usual long motorway and shorter country and urban travel, easily bettered those with an average of 41.4 mpg, which given its engine size, power, auto gearbox with 4WD was excellent. The CO2 emissions are 160 g/km which means the diesel rate First Year VED road tax cost is £855 before the £145 Standard rate is applied. Company car drivers will pay 36% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 25E and Warranty three years/60,000 miles.

VERDICT

The Ford Kuga is still a great all-rounder mid-sized SUV with a wide range of models to select from whether it's a retail or fleet/business user-chooser customer. It's well made, well equipped, has excellent handling and competitive pricing, so no wonder it still sells in big numbers.

For: Proven popularity, huge range of models and prices to select from, well equipped, well made, taught and well balanced handling, compliant ride, good real-life fuel economy.

Against: Nothing of real note but sat-nav system froze twice during my test driving week, ungenerous warranty.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in brief:

2019 Ford Kuga ST-Line Edition, 2.0 TDCi, Start/Stop, six-speed auto with 4WD.

Price: £36,260.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder, TDCi turbodiesel, 180 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six-speed dual clutch automatic with 4WD.

Performance: 124 mph, 0–62 mph 10.0 seconds, WLTP Combined Cycle 37.7 to 38.7 mpg (41.4 mpg real-life on-test figure), CO2 160 g/km, VED First Year diesel rate road tax £855 then £145 Standard rate, BiK tax 36%.

Insurance Group: 25E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions: L 4,541 mm (14.90 ft), W 1,838 mm (6.03 ft), H 1,737 mm (5.70 ft), wheelbase 2,690 mm (8.83 ft), boot/load space 406 to 1,603 litres (14.34 to 56.61 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,100 kg (4,630 lb), five doors/five seats.